

# THE WEATHERVANE

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ONCE YOU GET IT PAST YOUR NOSE, IT'S STILL FUNKY.

Although it is well known that marijuana is classified as a schedule one narcotic, no one seriously considers that it should be thought of like heroin. Nor should it be included as a schedule two or three drug such as Demerol, hydrocodone, or amphetamine. Ignoring the federal statute, thirty-three states and the District of Columbia have enacted laws broadly legalizing pot in some form. A host of companies including the world's biggest brewers are struggling to make a drinkable cannabis. Problems are multiple. The oily THC extracts don't mix with water, and to get a proper blend with each sip requires frequent shaking. Moreover, the cannabis must pass through the liver, so it takes too long for the drinker to feel the effects, usually about one-half hour. One current approach is to prepare a sweetened drinkable cannabis, promising anxiety reduction, pain relief or better sleep. But one sense intervenes: marijuana-infused beverages produce hints of dirty socks. The taste has been compared to dish soap and urine. One advocate says, "It's very grassy and very funky." Despite the negatives, the major makers of intoxicating beverages Anheuser Busch, Molson Coors Brewing Co. and Corona maker Constellations Brands Inc. are forming partnerships with Canadian marijuana companies. All are throwing their muscle into the task of making cannabis drinks. One chief executive said the global marijuana market could eventually top today's \$100 billion annual US market for beer. Perhaps, but right now don't get in line.

WHOA. WE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE THE MOST FERTILE LAND IN THE WORLD.

There has been a marked decline in US fertility rates in recent years. Some have asked if this is due to abortion frequency and the answer is no. Fertility is near record lows on two measures: around 3.85 million babies were born in 2017, the lowest number since 1987. And the total number of children women are expected to have in their lifetime is 1.8, approaching the 1976 low of 1.7. For the first time since 1975 the abortion total dropped below one million in 2013 when 958,700, were numbered, and has continued downward to 926,000 in 2014. These data are collected by the Guttmacher Institute, a research organization started in 1968 that assembles data by contacting all known facilities where abortion is provided. In addition to tracking abortions, Guttmacher also counts the number of facilities where abortion is provided, something the CDC doesn't track. The number of clinics where abortion is provided has dropped 6% between 2011 and 2014 with the steepest decline in the Midwest (22%) and south (13%). Among the factors often overlooked contributing to the decline are the increased use of long-acting reversible birth control and a reduction in the number of unplanned pregnancies.

HEY DOC. MAYBE IT'S TIME TO PUT DOWN THAT KNIFE AND GO GOLFING.

According to the American Medical Colleges Physician Specialty Data Report, in 2017, 44% of 103,032 active surgeons in the United States are 55 years or older with a spread of 40.9% still doing vascular surgery to 58.1% doing thoracic surgery. Surgeons are not immune to the decline in cognitive function that accompanies aging. Also hearing, olfactory and visual functions deteriorate. In one study of nearly 900,000 Medicare patients who had operations performed by older surgeons (beyond 60 years) had lower mortality than patients who had operations performed by younger surgeons. In contrast, another study of the files of 461,000 Medicare patients operated for pancreatotomy and coronary artery bypass grafting found that younger surgeons (ages 41 to 50) had lower mortality rates than older surgeons (beyond 60 years). How about mandatory retirement age? No, in the United States that would be illegal, unfair and inappropriate. Russia and China retire male surgeons at 60 years and women age 55. However, Congress has mandated retirement for commercial airline pilots 65 years, FBI agents 57 years, National Park Rangers 57 years, air traffic controllers 56 years and lighthouse operators 55 years. So, there you are. Gathering it all up one is possibly safer with maturity or maybe not.

EXCITING DEVELOPMENT IN LASER FUNCTION AT MIT.

Using a laser tuned to interact with water vapor in the air, researchers created sounds in a localized spot just loud enough to be picked up by the human ear. This is the primary event using this technique safely around humans. Reporting in *Optics Letters*, scientists worked at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Using these wavelengths and power the laser will not burn the eyes or skin. The team tested the setup in the lab on themselves. Physicist Charles Wynn said, "You move your head around, and there's a couple-inch zone where you go, Oh, there it is. It's pretty cool." The task relies on the photoacoustic effect, where pulses of light are converted into sound when absorbed by water vapor. It is still a primitive mechanism, but the potential for extended use is huge.

ADDENDA

- How does an elephant get down from a ladder? He doesn't get down from a ladder. He gets down from a goose.
- The first computer was in the Garden of Eden. It was an Apple with very limited memory. One byte and everything crashed.
- Progress was alright once, but it has gone on far too long.
- I didn't know he was dead. I thought he was British.
- We may eventually come to realize that chastity is no more a virtue than malnutrition.

ALOHA AND KEEP THE FAITH *rt*s

*(Editorial comment is strictly that of the writer.)*